IT in rural areas

†1326. SHRIMATI SAROJ DUBEY: Will the Minister of INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government propose to run an effective and concrete scheme to extend maximum benefit of information technology in rural areas;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS AND MINISTER OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRI PRAMOD MAHAJAN): (a) to (c) Ministry of Information Technology has initiated the following projects for extending the benefits of Information Technology to rural areas:

(i) Village Information Centre

(ii) Community Information Centre

(iii) Land Record Computerisation Project

(iv) Computerised Rural Development System Project (CRISP)

The details of these projects are given in the Statement-I (*See* below).

Ministry of Information Technology had set up a Working Group on Information Technology for Masses on 10th May, 2000 and this Group submitted its report on 29th July, 2000. The main recommendations of the Working Group are given in the Statement-II (*See* below).

Statement-I

Details of the Projects for extending the benefits of Information Technology

(i) Village Information Centre:

This project is being implemented at Mudukulathur and Bogallur Blocks of Ramanathapuram District of Tamil Nadu. The broad objectives of the project are:—

1. To initiate a network of Village Information Centres (VIC) in Ramanathapuram Distt., Tamil Nadu to provide Information Services for 20-30 Gram Panchayats in two blocks *i.e.* Mudukulathur and Bogallur.

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

2. To develop Computer Application to support VIC network in the area listed below:—

— Public Health

— Village Level Resource Map

— Crop Planning

— Soil Preservation and Fertility Management

The project was initiated in January, 1998. The total cost of the project is Rs. 15.48 lacs. The duration of the project is three years. The project will be completed in December, 2000. The project is being implemented by Centre for Ecology and Rural Development (CERD) Pondicherry.

On successful completion of the project, the technology will be useful for similar applications.

(ii) Community Information Centre:

The project is planned to be implemented in 446 blocks in North East States to promote Information Technology and its applications. Another 40 centres will be set up in Sikkim as part of Prime Minister's package for the North East. The project will be implemented in next two years at a cost of Rs. 220 Crores.

A pilot project is being implemented in 30 blocks which are representatives of remaining blocks in each State to be completed and an estimated cost of Rs. 15 Crores by 15th August, 2000. The implementing agency for this purpose is NIC/NICSI. Under the pilot project 15 blocks of Assam, 3 blocks of Tripura and 2 blocks each of Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Sikkim have been taken up. The Community Information Centre will facilitate document storage, information procurement, processing and transferring of data in a faster/efficient and accurate manner. It will also benefit commercial entities, educational and training Institutes in these States besides assisting the Government at the time of management of national calamities for disaster management system of the Government and also at the time of national emergencies, it will also provide an e-mail linkage to the citizens at the grassroot level.

(iii) Land Record Computerization Project

Land Record Computerization Project is being implemented by NIC for land revenue management which is of vital significance as far as rural

are concerned. The scheme is being implemented since 1994-95 in collaboration with Department of Land Resources, Ministry of Rural Development. At present the scheme is being implemented in 544 districts of the country leaving only those districts where there are no land records. During 1997-98, a decision for operationalisation of the scheme at Tehsil/Taluk's level was taken for facilitating delivery of computerized records to the users and public at large. Under this program approximately 1400 Tehseals/Taluks have been covered upto end of the year 1999.

(iv) Computerized Rural Information Systems Project (CRISP).

The objective of the project is to strengthen the monitoring of rural development schemes. The project is being implemented by NIC and is sponsored by Ministry of Rural Development. The software developed under the project would be used at District Rural Development Agencies (DRDA). It would strengthen the computer and communication environment at each of the DRDAs and improve monitoring exercise related to various rural development schemes.

Statement-II

Main Recommendations of the Working Group on Information Technology for Masses

The Working Group on "IT for Masses", has recommended that

1. Government should facilitate establishment of one million IT Kiosks, with useful Government and private content available on revenue sharing basis.

2. Take up immediate programme to establish IT education infrastructure in 60,000 schools.

3. Launch Mass Awareness Campaign through IT Yatras and other programmes.

4. Set up specific time table for Web-enabled Citizen Oriented Government Services; and

5. Set up 'IT Mission' for 5 years to carry out this focussed programme.

The theme on which the report revolves, is that IT can be effective tool of "Empowering people" in real sense. To achieve this objective, it is necessary

to provide "Easy Access at affordable rates", "1 million IT Kiosk by 2005" will be the model to reach out to the masses who can not afford PC and Internet. The theme of the Working Group emphasizes that spread of IT is possible if IT infrastructure penetrates to schools, at the earliest. Government must develop Web-centric Citizen Oriented applications and make it available on Public Access System. Mass awareness Campaign is needed to make public aware of the immense benefits of the IT revolution. All these efforts will ensure "Digital Unite" rather than "Digital Divide".

The other major recommendations are, that mile connectivity should be franchised on revenue sharing model, private E-Com information infrastructures should be allowed CUG status, promote indigenous technology for low cost Internet access devices and Indian language development, Right of Way should be granted cable operators also. On E-Governance front the Working Group has recommended that Centre and States should prepare five year IT Plans and keep 5% of the budget for this which will ensure more productive and efficient use of remaining 95% of the budget; take immediate steps for sensitization of decision makers, standardize formats and procedures by setting up Administrative Reengineering Commission; make sure that IT infrastructure is in place at working level staff by 2003 and set up time table for citizen oriented applications to go on Web.

The Group has recommended that 60,000 schools in 6000 blocks, should have minimum 10 PC infrasturcture in place in five year time frame. This is possible through joint efforts of Centre and State Governments, industry, NGOs, donors, NRIs and schools themselves. Central Government can either provide 10% of the cost or provide free Internet, useful appliances, CDs and Teachers training.

The Group has also suggested a new scheme called "Antyodaya Computer Literacy Programme". One lakh youths from SC/ST/BPL will be provided IT foundation course in this scheme every year for next five years.

In a novel scheme, the Woking Group has suggested that IT YATRA should be organised between January, 2001 to February, 2001 from four corners of the country, demonstrating "benefits of IT in empowering people". Various competitions and National IT talent search are other programmes of the recommended package.

The Group has recommended setting up of "IT Mission" for focussed follow up on all these measures for the period of next five years.